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SUBJECT: USUNESCO -- UNESCO 171st EXECUTIVE BOARD:
U.S. CROSS-SECTOR CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE
ENTHUSIASTICALLY ADOPTED

Reftel: Paris 1032

¶11. Summary and Comment: The U.S. draft decision establishing a cross-sector capacity building program was adopted, to general acclaim, at the 171st meeting of UNESCO's Executive Board. The resolution, the first presented by the U.S. since reentry, was co-sponsored by twenty-one other member states. The Assistant Director General for Natural Sciences remarked that the enthusiastic support voiced for the initiative would give momentum to the program. The next step will be for the science sector to fill the P-5 position that will oversee the new capacity building unit established in the Science Sector. It will be important to ensure that benchmarks are established for these activities, as well as a means of measuring "outputs." It will also be important to engage the U.S. scientific community in support of activities created in the context of this initiative. A successful capacity building program may help encourage UNESCO's secretariat and member states to pursue constructive initiatives, rather than squander limited resources on non-consensual activities with little positive, concrete impact. End Summary and Comment.

¶12. At the 171st meeting of the Executive Board, Ambassador Oliver presented for the Board's consideration a draft decision for "a cross-sector program on capacity building." This was the first decision presented to the Executive Board by the U.S. since our re-entry in 2003. The Office of the Director General opened the debate by "endorsing and welcoming the initiative."

¶13. In her presentation, Ambassador Oliver stressed that UNESCO programs must incorporate capacity building if they are to have long-term sustainable results. She explained that the draft decision welcomed the creation of a unit in the Natural Sciences sector to coordinate the sector's capacity building efforts, with a focus on basic science and mathematics education; engineering; and water-related efforts. Ambassador Oliver noted that the draft decision requested the Director General to expand the concept of capacity building throughout UNESCO by developing cross-sector activities that include capacity building as a central concept. She highlighted the fact that the decision promotes a management and administrative approach, and would have no budgetary impact. She noted that the decision asks the Director General to develop a comprehensive cross-sector capacity building program at UNESCO, assuming that an evaluation of initial pilot activities is positive.

¶14. As the Ambassador noted in her intervention, the need and desire for such an approach was evidenced by the list of co-sponsors: Afghanistan, Australia, China, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, India, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Russia, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Turkey, United Kingdom, and Yemen. Tunisia also approached Ambassador Oliver just before she spoke asking to be included as a co-sponsor.

¶15. During the debate, many of these co-sponsors - as well as other Executive Board members - voiced wholehearted support for the proposal. The debate amounted to, in the words of Ecuador, "a shower of praise for this initiative." Twenty-five Executive Board members spoke in support of the proposal, many commenting that the initiative would help UNESCO do a better job of translating its resources into results-oriented programs: "as a whole," Australia remarked, "it encapsulates the direction in which UNESCO ought to be going." Many praised the fact that it encourages UNESCO's sectors to work together. The Afghan Ambassador stressed the initiative's utility for Least Developed Countries and post-conflict states, declaring "this program will give us the confidence and knowledge to do what others are now doing for us." Several member states, including Australia, Indonesia, and Russia, noted approvingly the proposal's emphasis on strengthening engineering at UNESCO.

¶16. In her response to these interventions, the Ambassador expressed thanks. She welcomed the observation of Mauritius, who noted approvingly that the draft decision stressed the creation of benchmarks and the evaluation of

results; he said that it was important that "outputs", rather than activities, be measured. Mauritius also underlined the importance of stemming the "brain drain". The Ambassador accepted an amendment from Tanzania, who asked that "innovation and technology management" be added as an area of focus for the Science Sector capacity building unit.

¶7. After the debate, the Assistant Director General for Science predicted that the enthusiastic support voiced for the initiative would give momentum to the program, both within the Science Sector and within the cross-sector context. He acknowledged that the next step would be to hire a P-5 to oversee the new capacity building unit established in the Science Sector; it is imperative that this be done as soon as possible, he noted.

OLIVER